DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 457 433 CG 031 169

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TITLE Assessing the Effectiveness of School Guidance Programs: Program, Personnel, and Results Evaluation.
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 13p.; In its: Assessment: Issues and Challenges for the Millennium; see CG 031 161.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Evaluation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Guidance Programs; *Program Evaluation; *School Counselors; *School Guidance; State Standards
IDENTIFIERS Missouri State Dept Elementary Secondary Education

ABSTRACT

Three forms of evaluation are required to fully evaluate comprehensive school guidance programs. First, the program must be reviewed using program standards, evidence, and documentation to establish that a written guidance program exists in a school district and that the written program matches the implemented program. Second, guidance program personnel need job descriptions derived directly from the program so that evaluation forms can be developed and used for formative and summative personnel evaluation. Third, results evaluation that focuses on the impact of the guidance and counseling activities in the guidance curriculum; individual planning; responsive services; and system-support components of a comprehensive guidance program is necessary. This document reports that 20 years of research show positive effects of guidance counseling on students' academic achievement. A set of standards is included for professional school counselor evaluations issued by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Illustrations of immediate and intermediate results evaluation using the structure of the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program are presented. (Contains 16 references.) (JDM)

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ED 457 433

Assessing the Effectiveness of School Guidance Programs: Program, Personnel, and Results Evaluation

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Chapter Nine

Assessing the Effectiveness of School Guidance Programs: Program, Personnel, and Results Evaluation

Norman C. Gysbers

Abstract

In order to fully evaluate comprehensive school guidance programs, three forms of evaluation are required. First, the program must be reviewed using program standards, evidence, and documentation to establish that a written guidance program exists in a school district or building and that the written program matches the implemented program. Second, guidance-program personnel need job descriptions derived directly from the program so that evaluation forms can be developed and used for formative and summative personnel evaluation. Third, results evaluation that focuses on the impact of the guidance and counseling activities in the guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system-support components of a comprehensive guidance program is necessary. The results of 20 years of research show positive effects of effective guidance counseling on students' academic achievement.

Demonstrating accountability through the measured effectiveness of the delivery of guidance programs and the performance of the guidance personnel involved helps ensure that students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the general public will continue to benefit from quality, comprehensive guidance programs. To achieve accountability, evaluation is needed concerning the nature, structure, organization, and implementation of school-district guidance programs; the school counselors and other personnel who are implementing the programs; and the impact the programs are having on students, the schools where they learn, and the communities in which they live. This means that the overall evaluation of school-district guidance programs should be approached in the following three ways: program

evaluation, personnel evaluation, and results evaluation (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). This article defines each of these types of evaluation and then briefly describes how each type of evaluation can be carried out. Finally, the last section presents data from a number of studies highlighting what we have learned so far from results evaluation efforts.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation measures two questions: Does the school district have a written comprehensive guidance program? Is the written program of the district being implemented fully in the school buildings of that district? Answers to these questions are provided through a process called *program evaluation*, the goal of which is to examine the written program carefully and verify through documentation that it is the program being implemented. Whether or not a written guidance program exists in the district and whether or not any discrepancies exist between the written guidance program and the program actually implemented become clear as the program evaluation process unfolds.

To conduct program evaluation, program standards are required. *Program standards* are acknowledged measures of comparison or the criteria used to make judgments about the adequacy of the nature and structure of the program as well as the degree to which the program is in place. How many program standards are required to establish whether a comprehensive guidance program is in place and functioning? The answer is that sufficient standards are required to ensure that judgments can be made concerning whether or not a complete, comprehensive guidance program is actually in place and functioning to a high enough degree to benefit fully all students, parents, teachers, and the community. To illustrate what a program standard looks like, here is an example:

> The school district is able to demonstrate that all students are provided the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that lead to a self-sufficient, socially responsible life.

A school district meeting this standard has defined the content that all students should learn in a systematic, sequential way. The content goals are tied to those defined in the basic mission of the school district and are based on human development theories regarding individuals' personal, social, career, and educational development. The content is further defined in a scope and sequence that outlines the guidance curriculum. The implementation of the guidance-curriculum component of a comprehensive guidance program entails teaching lessons and units designed to help students acquire the competencies outlined in the scope and sequence.

What would an evaluator look for to see that this standard is in place? Here are some examples:

- A developmentally appropriate guidance curriculum that teaches all students the knowledge and skills they need to be self-sufficient and lead socially responsible lives.
- A guidance curriculum that is articulated from elementary to middle to high schools.
- Priorities that are established for the acquisition of competencies by students at each grade level or grade-level grouping.
- Sufficient curriculum materials to support the teaching of the needed knowledge and skills.
- A yearly schedule that incorporates classroom guidance units.
- Students in special education and other special programs receiving guidance curriculum instruction.

To make judgments about guidance programs using standards, evidence is needed concerning whether or not the standards are being met. In program evaluation such evidence is called *documentation*. For the standard listed previously, evidence that it is in place might include the following:

- District guidance-curriculum guides.
- District guidance-curriculum scope and sequence.
- Teachers' and counselors' lesson plans.
- Yearly master calendar for the guidance program.

(Gysbers & Henderson, 2000, p. 405)

Personnel Evaluation

A key part of comprehensive guidance program implementation and management is a school counselor performance improvement system.[1] The basic purpose of this system is to assist school counselors in reaching and enhancing their professional potential. It helps individuals define their jobs, provide professional supervision, conduct performance evaluation, and set goals for continued professional development. The purposes of evaluating school counselors' performance are to improve the delivery to and impact of the program on the students and parents it serves and to provide for communication among school counselors, guidance-program staff leaders, and school administrators. For school counselors, evaluation specifies contract status recommendations and provides summative evaluation as to their effectiveness. For the school district, evaluation defines expectations for school counselors' performance and provides a systematic means of measuring their performance relative to these expectations.

The three facets of the performance-evaluation part of a school counselor performance-improvement system are (a) self evaluation, (b) administrative evaluation, and (c) assessment of goal attainment. Self-evaluation and administrative evaluation focus on job-performance competencies and represent data-supported professional judgments as to school counselors' proficiency in using the skills and commitment levels required for their jobs. The assessment of goal attainment focuses on school counselors' efforts to improve the program and their professionalism.

For performance evaluation to be done fairly, many data sources are used as each part of a performance-improvement system is implemented. Specific examples of typical behaviors of individual school counselors are gathered throughout the year and documented. These patterns of behavior are then compared and contrasted with clearly stated professional standards. Recently the state of Missouri adopted a set of standards for professional school counselor evaluation. These standards with criteria are as follows (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2000, pp. 27–28):

Standard 1: The professional school counselor implements the Guidance Curriculum Component through the use of effective instructional skills and the careful planning of structured group sessions for all students.

Criterion 1: The professional school counselor teaches guidance units effectively.

Criterion 2: The professional school counselor encourages staff involvement to ensure the effective implementation of the guidance curriculum.

Standard 2: The professional school counselor implements the Individual Planning Component by guiding individuals and groups of students and their parents through the development of educational and career plans.

Criterion 3: The professional school counselor, in collaboration with parents, helps students establish goals and develop and use planning skills.

Criterion 4: The professional school counselor demonstrates accurate andappropriate interpretation of assessment data and

the presentation of relevant, unbiased information.

Standard 3: The professional school counselor implements the Responsive Services Component through the effective use of individual and small-group counseling, consultation, and referral skills.

Criterion 5: The professional school counselor counsels individual students and small groups of students with identified needs/concerns.

Criterion 6: The professional school counselor consults effectively with parents, teachers, administrators, and other relevant individuals.

Criterion 7: The professional school counselor implements an effective referral process in collaboration with parents, administrators, teachers, and other school personnel.

Standard 4: The professional school counselor implements the System Support component through effective guidance program management and support for other educational programs.

Criterion 8: The professional school counselor provides a comprehensive and balanced guidance program in collaboration with school staff.

Criterion 9: The professional school counselor provides support for other school programs.

Standard 5: The professional school counselor uses professional communication and interaction with the school community.

Criterion 10: The professional school counselor demonstrates positive interpersonal relations with students.

Criterion 11: The professional school counselor demonstrates positive interpersonal relations with educational staff.

Criterion 12: The professional school counselor demonstrates positive interpersonal relations with parents/patrons.

Standard 6: The professional school counselor fulfills professional responsibilities.

Criterion 13: The professional school counselor demonstrates a commitment to ongoing professional growth.

Criterion 14: The professional school counselor possesses professional and responsible work habits.

Criterion 15: The professional school counselor follows the profession's ethical and legal standards and guidelines, as well as promotes cultural diversity and inclusivity in school policy and interpersonal relationships.

Results Evaluation

Having established that a guidance program is operating in a school district through program evaluation, and having established through personnel evaluation that school counselors and other guidance program personnel are carrying out the duties listed on their job descriptions 100% of the time, it now is possible to evaluate the results of the program. Johnson (1991) suggested that there are long-range, intermediate, immediate, and unplanned-for results that need consideration. According to Johnson, *long-range results* focus on how programs affect students after they have left school. Usually long-range results are gathered using follow-up studies. *Intermediate results* focus on the knowledge and skills all students may gain by graduation from participating in the guidance program. *Immediate results* are the knowledge and skills students may gain from participating in specific guidance activities. Finally, the possibility of *unplanned-for results* that may occur as a consequence of guidance activities also needs to be taken into account.

For the purposes of this article, illustrations of immediate and intermediate results evaluation using the structure of the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program (Gysbers, Starr, & Magnuson, 1998) are presented in the form of two research questions. First, do students master guidance competencies as a result of their participation in the guidance curriculum component of the program (immediate evaluation)? Second, do students develop and use career plans as a result of their participation in the individual planning component of the program (intermediate evaluation)?

Immediate Evaluation: Guidance Competency Mastery

Do students master guidance competencies? Johnson (1991) outlined the following procedures to answer this question in terms of immediate results. First the competencies to be mastered need to be identified. Second *what* results (what students should be able to write, talk about, or do) are specified. Then *who* will conduct the evaluation is decided. This is followed by a design about *when* the evaluation is done. Then *criteria* are established so that judgments can be made about students' mastery of guidance competencies. Finally, *how* all of this is to be accomplished is specified.

Another way to conduct immediate evaluation to measure mastery of guidance competencies is the use of a confidence survey. In this format, guidance competencies are listed and students are asked to rate on a Likert scale how confident they are that they have mastered these competencies. The confidence survey can then be used as a pre-post measure. Gain scores can be obtained and related to such measures as academic achievement and vocational identity (Gysbers, Lapan, Multon, & Lukin, 1992; Lapan, Gysbers, Hughey, & Arni, 1993).

Intermediate Evaluation: Career Plans

Do students develop and use career plans? In making judgments concerning the career plans of students, criteria need to be identified as to what makes a good plan. Four criteria are recommended: a plan needs to be comprehensive, developmental, student-centered and student-directed, and competency-based. One way to evaluate students' career plans is to judge the extent to which the activities included in the individual planning component of the guidance program lead to the development of plans that meet these criteria. A second way is to make judgments about the adequacy of the plans' contents. Finally, a third way is to judge their use. Do students actually use their career plans in planning for the future?

What Have We Learned So Far From Results Evaluation?

The major reason to plan, design, and implement comprehensive guidance programs is to assist students in their academic, career, and personal development, working in close consultation with their parents. Do guidance programs and the interventions used produce measurable results? The cumulative empirical research evidence from more than 20 years of professional literature unequivocally indicates that the answer to this question is yes.

What kind of results do guidance programs and the interventions used produce? Here are some examples. In a major review of the

literature in school counseling, Borders and Drury (1992) found that guidance-program interventions have a substantial impact on students' educational and personal development and that they contribute to students' success in the classroom. Gerler (1985) analyzed a decade of research on the results of elementary school counseling and found that guidance-program interventions in the affective, behavioral, and interpersonal domains of students' lives positively affected students' academic achievement. The results of a study by Lee (1993) showed that classroom guidance lessons in elementary school led by school counselors positively influenced students' academic achievement in mathematics. Similar results were found by St. Clair (1989) in her review of the impact of guidance-program interventions at the middle school level. Further, Evans and Burck (1992) conducted a meta-analysis of 67 studies concerning the impact of career education interventions (career guidance) on students' academic achievement. Their results supported the value of these interventions as contributors to the academic achievement of students.

More recently, studies conducted in Missouri and Utah provide additional evidence of the value of comprehensive guidance programs. In a study conducted in Missouri high schools, Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun (1997) found that students in high schools with more fully implemented guidance programs were more likely to report that they had earned higher grades, their education was better preparing them for their future, their school made more career and college information available to them, and their school had a more positive climate. In another study in Missouri, when classroom teachers in 184 small-, medium-, and large-sized middle schools rated guidance programs in their schools as more fully implemented, seventh graders in these schools reported that they had earned higher grades, school was more relevant for them, they had positive relationships with teachers, they were satisfied with their education, and they felt safer in school (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, in press). In addition, in a study conducted in the state of Utah, strong guidance programs were found effective in helping students target areas of educational or career emphasis. In schools with highly implemented programs there were also documented increases in enrollment for courses related to specific educational goals or careers, e.g., advanced math and science courses and vocational/technical courses. In addition, high student performance on the American College Test (ACT), a standardized achievement test, was related to enrollment in schools with highly implemented guidance programs. Scores were significantly higher on all four skill areas of the ACT (mathematics, English, reading, and science) than student scores from low-implementing schools and the scores for the state of Utah as a whole. These results suggest student learning increases when courses are

organized around a relevant area of interest (Utah State Office of Education, 2000).

Finally, in their review of outcome research in school counseling, Sexton, Whiston, Bleuer, & Walz (1997, p. 125) made the following points:

- Reviews of outcome research in school counseling are generally positive about the effects of school counseling.
- Research results do indicate that individual planning interventions can have a positive impact on the development of students' career plans.
- There is some support for responsive service activities such as social skills training, family-support programs, and peer counseling. Consultation activities are also found to be an effective school counseling activity.

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Norman C. Gysbers is a professor in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology at the University of Missouri–Columbia. He received his M.A. (1959) and Ph.D. (1963) degrees from the University of Michigan. Gysbers' research and teaching interests are in career development; career counseling; and school guidance and counseling program development, management, and evaluation. He is author of 59 articles in 17 different professional journals, 25 chapters in published books, 14 monographs, and 13 books, including *Career Counseling: Process, Issues, and Techniques*, 1998 (with Mary Heppner and Joseph Johnston); *Leading and Managing Your School Guidance Program Staff*, 1998 (with Patricia Henderson); and *Developing and Managing Your School Guidance Program* (3rd. ed.), 2000 (with Patricia Henderson). In 1981 he was awarded the National Vocational Guidance Association National Merit Award and in 1983 the American Counseling Association Distinguished Professional Service Award. In 1989 he received the National Career Development Association Eminent Career Award and in 2000 he received the National Career Development Association Presidents Recognition Award. Currently Gysbers is the editor of the *Journal of Career Development*.

1. For a complete description and discussion of a school counselor performance-improvement system, please see Henderson, P., & Gysbers, N. C. (1998). *Leading and managing your school guidance program staff*. Alexandria VA: American Counseling Association.